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In each of three historical periods, an effort was made, conscious or otherwise, to unite the prevailing knowledge of language into a pattern of language teaching. In the "pre-linguistic" period, emphasis was on encyclopedic formal knowledge, grammar-translation, reading , and writing. During the "linguistic" period, the study of language became more "objective" because the prevailing scientific viewpoint valued dispassionate observation of data. Representative of this period is Lado's "Language Teaching," which characterizes the aural-oral, contrastive analysis approach of the 1950's. The goals of linguistics in the last decade, the "contemporary" period, as pursued by Chomsky, Fillmore, and others, are vastly different, "ith emphasis on understanding the "higher mental process." One result of all this activity is that the linguistic method of language teaching is under severe attack from various sides. We should view with some skepticism, the author warns, a "new pedagogy in which the new linguistics, the new psychology, and the new demands made of our educational system will find themselves welded into a new unity which will have as little theoretical justification as any past unity." We need a new unity "in order to reflect our current characterization of the basic disciplines and to justify what we are doing in classrooms." (AMM)

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Linguistics, Psychology, and Pedagogy: Trinity or Unity?*

Ronald Wardhaugh

Most of us would agree that a variety of different educational goals exists within what we call TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), but we would probably insist that we should share a common pedagogy in which the linguistic, psychological, and educational variables find a unity.

The problem I have chosen involves an examination of these three different variables to discover what the relationship among them has been in the past, is now, and could become in the future. What should a teacher engaged in TESOL know of linguistics, of psychology, and of pedagogy? How much does each of these three disciplines contribute to the others? Are they perhaps quite separate with nothing at all to contribute to each other? May not any unity we find be in reality a forced one, a marriage of convenience (*à trois*, of course), or a rationalization of existing practice rather than a theoretically valid unity? Do we, to refer to my title, have a *trinity* or a *unity*? The examination I propose seems particularly necessary at this point in time when the three disciplines themselves are in a state of change, when linguistics is filled with controversy concerning the proper goals of linguistic endeavor, when learning psychology is apparently moving away from studies of rats in mazes and of pigeons in boxes to computer simulation of behavior and to studies of electrical, chemical, and neurophysiological functioning, and when pedagogy is concerned more and more with content, with strategies of learning, and with the structuring of knowledge.

It should be pointed out, however, that even in this apparent disunity in the disciplines there is a very remarkable kind of unity. Each of the disciplines is reverting to types of inquiry which certain former practitioners of the discipline pursued. In current linguistics Chomsky has looked so far into the past for historical antecedents to his interests in linguistic theory and language acquisition that he has even been called a "neomedieval philosopher" by one of his critics[1]. In current psychology there is a return to some of the concerns of early psychologists, to such concerns as reasoning and the genesis of ideation. No longer is the inside of the "black box" forbidden territory. In current educational thought there has been a noticeable return to a kind of neo-pragmatism, to a "John Dewey with a hard nose" approach, to quote a recent issue of *Saturday Review*[2]. However, this kind of unity, or disunity if you wish to call it such, is not the kind I

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[1] Charles F. Hockett, review of *Biological Foundations of Language* by Eric H. Lenneberg, *Scientific American*, 217:5 (November, 1967), 14.

[2] December 16, 1967.

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want to concentrate my attention upon. Rather I propose to show that in each historical period an attempt is made, conscious or otherwise, to unite the prevailing knowledge of language, the prevailing understanding of language learning, and the prevailing concept of educational goals into a pattern of language teaching. Such a pattern may actually be said to represent the best thought of its time, so that it demonstrates the "conventional wisdom" of its period. It would, of course, be quite untrue to say that such a pattern is universally subscribed to in its period, for apparently there has never been a time when one pattern of second-language teaching existed to the exclusion of all others.

At the risk of oversimplification I am going to characterize this pattern for each of three historical periods, periods which, for convenience only, I shall call the *prelinguistic* period, the *linguistic* period, and the *contemporary* period. I also very deliberately use the word *characterize*, for I believe that at any one time we can characterize our own discipline both as it exists at that time and as it seems to have existed at other times. Such characterizations may be myths, but they are no less important for that because they provide us with a foundation, or a rationale if you prefer that term, on which to base our teaching. Let us look then at characterizations of these various periods, taking the prelinguistic period and its pattern of language teaching first.

In the modern part of the prelinguistic period, that is, in the years immediately before, and to some extent during, the beginnings of modern linguistic science, there was, in the school rooms at least, a confusion of speech and writing, a belief in the appropriateness of a universal Latinate model for all languages, and no real search for theories which might account for the complexities of a natural language. In psychology the emphasis was on such concepts as the association of ideas, mental discipline, over-learning, memory, and forgetting. It is not surprising then that when the educated élite of the period prized the classics and placed great value on encyclopedic formal knowledge, the prevailing pedagogy in second-language teaching should have been one which emphasized grammar-translation, learning *about* a language rather than learning a language, and reading and writing rather than listening and speaking. Obviously, there were strong undercurrents of dissent from such emphases, but they were no more than that. If one wishes to choose representative books for the prelinguistic period, he need go no further than the phrase books in which there are the foreign language equivalents of such an expression as "The postillion has been struck by lightning" or the famous *Coleman Report*[3] with its claims about the desirability of teaching students to read foreign languages.

Let me pause to make one point quite clear. I am not saying that second languages were *not* taught successfully in this period. Undoubtedly they often were. The goals set out for language teaching were probably achieved quite regularly by those teachers who believed in what they were doing.

[3] Algernon Coleman, *The Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages in the United States* (New York: American and Canadian Committees on Modern Languages, 1929).

These goals certainly differed from the goals we have today, but that is quite another matter. We must also presume that the teachers did find a unity among linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy and that they could justify what they were doing either in terms of stating a set of principles on which their practices were based, hence *a priori*, or in terms of a rationalization to justify practice, hence *a posteriori*.

More relevant to us as teacher trainers than the prelinguistic period is the linguistic period, for it was in this period that most of us were trained ourselves, and it is just such training that is behind us in our work today. However, as I intend to emphasize, the students we are training today are almost certainly not going to be working in what I am referring to as the linguistic period. They are going to be working in a period which will have to be characterized in quite a different way from the characterization that I am now going to present for the linguistic period.

In the linguistic period of second-language teaching the study of language became more "objective" because the prevailing scientific viewpoint in language study valued dispassionate observation of data. The period also witnessed important attempts to wrestle with the implications of various distinctions: for example, the speech-writing distinction and the Saussurean *langue-parole* distinction. However, in connection with the latter it must be emphasized that there was greater concentration on *parole* than on *langue*. There was also a widespread belief that, given any language, a linguist could describe, through either postulation or discovery, its significant units, significant contrasts, and significant patterns. This characterization needs no further amplification; it is doubtless very familiar to us all.

We undoubtedly have a similar familiarity with the prevailing psychology. This too became more "scientific" and "experimental." We have heard about the laws of learning (*à la* Thorndike) and about such notions as transfer and interference. We are aware of both Watsonian behaviorism and Skinnerian reinforcement, and we know better than to ignore the patterns discussed by the Gestaltists. In psychology the period was one in which psychologists emphasized habit formation, induction, and transfer, both positive and negative, and they too, like linguists, ruled the inside of the head almost entirely out of bounds as a legitimate area of concern.

When the pressures of war and international involvement made it necessary to teach second languages to large numbers of students in situations which enabled their teachers to employ subtle forms of coercion, a new unity was found, and it is not surprising that this unity reflected the kind of linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical interests just mentioned. Just as it is possible to choose a phrase book and the *Coleman Report* as representative works of the prelinguistic period, it is possible to choose a similar representative work for the linguistic period. Lado's book *Language Teaching*[4] is just such a work, for it is a deliberate attempt to formalize in

[4] Robert Lado, *Language Teaching. A Scientific Approach* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

extremely simple terms the prevailing views of linguistics and of psychology, and to integrate these into a statement about pedagogy. However, it could well be argued that in actual fact Lado's statement about language teaching is a rationalization or justification of a set of practices that had grown up unsystematically and accidentally rather than a rigorous statement of axioms and derivative practices. The book is actually a rather simple statement which characterizes the TESOL practices of the 1950's and tries to give them a strong theoretical base. As a characterization it offered teachers a rationalization for what they were doing and a justification, too, for the use of such technological innovations as language laboratories and even teaching machines. It is not necessary to go into the details of the pedagogy presented in *Language Teaching*, for most of us are undoubtedly familiar with the book. I think that we need only say that the book offers an account of language teaching which possesses all the advantages of a characterization, for it is economical, clear, and simple; however, at the same time it has all the disadvantages since it is really a statement of belief and as such perhaps unassailable and invulnerable.

When we turn from the linguistic period to the contemporary scene in linguistics, psychology, and TESOL in order to discover what each of these disciplines is like today, we should likewise look for evidence of disunity or unity. Are we still subscribers to the point of view formalized by Lado? If we are not, what characterization do we have to substitute for Lado's? What are we saying or what do we intend to say to the next generation of language teachers, that generation which is actually in our classrooms today seeking answers from us?

First of all, linguistics as a discipline has undergone a tremendous change in the last decade, a change of the kind that Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*[5] has called a revolution. The goals of the discipline as pursued by Chomsky, Fillmore, and others are vastly different from those of Bloomfield, Trager, and Hockett, and the problems that interest them are also different. In no way do I mean this statement to be a criticism of the interests of structural linguists, for linguistics is surely a big enough discipline to include widely diverging interests! However, it is true to say that the major thrust in contemporary linguistics is not towards an exploration of the formal characteristics of grammatical models and towards an understanding of the subtle interplay of syntax and semantics. There are also far different claims made today than a decade ago about what it means to *know* a language and to *acquire* a language even though this particular problem is usually discussed only in relation to first-language acquisition, with second-language acquisition hardly even mentioned.

In psychology, too, there have been great changes. Just as linguists have disputed the proper goals of linguistics, so have psychologists disputed the proper goals of psychology. One result of such dispute has been rather less observation of lower animals and rather more emphasis on understand-

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[5] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

ing the processes of perception, cognition, and learning: that is, on understanding the higher mental processes. Psychologists, too, are attempting to model the inside of the head and to simulate human capabilities in order to gain a better understanding of cognitive structures, categorizing abilities and information transmission, and of the various strategies and plans that an organism has available to it or can acquire. Even the postulation of innate structures and properties is found to be quite acceptable. In education, too, there is a return to the organization of knowledge, to the self discipline of learning, and to the range of individual variation in interest and ability.

One result of all this activity is that the linguistic method of language teaching is under severe attack from various sides. For illustration of this point I will quote a few criticisms and offer a comment or two on each. First, a criticism by Paul Roberts. Speaking of the wartime language schools, Roberts says:

> If you put a bright young soldier into a room with a native speaker of Japanese and keep them there eight hours a day for eighteen months, the soldier will learn quite a lot of Japanese, even if his text is just a Japanese translation of Cicero and his instructor is a nitwit. Unless, of course, the soldier simply goes mad, which also happened now and then.[6]

Obviously there is considerable truth in Roberts' statements. The linguistic method worked in many cases but other methods worked, too. The really interesting questions are, "Why does a method work and why does it work very well at one time but not well at all at another time?" A second comment comes from Robert Politzer at the conclusion of a report on an experiment in which various combinations of drill and explanation were compared:

> In conclusion we point out that the independent variable under investigation—place of or absence of explanation—does perhaps not have the importance attributed to it in some of the current pedagogical discussion. That class differences (even with classes taught by the same teacher!) turned out to be more significant than treatment differences is an indication that in the actual practical teaching situation the Foreign language teacher should indeed pay a great deal of attention to such variables as the time of meeting of the class, the degree of eagerness or tiredness of the student at certain times of the day, etc. As many Foreign language teachers have no doubt suspected for some time, such variables may, in the long run, make at least as much of a difference as some of the refinements of teaching methodology.[7]

Politzer's comment brings us a little closer to a full awareness of the complexity of the problem of understanding exactly what variables are important in language learning. Perhaps we should be a little more honest than we are and admit that we do not really know how people learn. At best we can make only more or less satisfactory guesses, and these guesses account for only parts of the language-learning process.

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[6] Paul Roberts, Foreword to *A Linguistics Reader*, ed. Graham Wilson (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. xxvii.

[7] Robert L. Politzer, "An Investigation of the Order of Presentation of Foreign Language Grammar Drills in Relation to Their Explanation." (United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research, Project 5-1096, September, 1967.)

The third statement is a claim about language learning and language teaching by William Bull:

> Learning to talk like a Spaniard means first to think like a Spaniard. This book is dedicated to the proposition that it is easier to learn to think like a Spaniard if the teacher can explain how a Spaniard thinks.[8]

The claim is a very strong one indeed, that we should teach Spanish by teaching the thought processes of Spaniards. The claim suggests that we know a lot about these processes. I would suggest that we know next to nothing about these processes and the claim is spurious. The book from which it comes also seems to suggest that somehow a generative-transformational grammar of Spanish offers some kind of characterization of the thought processes of Spanish speakers. Again this claim must be disputed. Still another instance of a similar kind of claim comes from a paper presented by Karl Diller at the Tenth International Congress of Linguists in Bucharest in 1967:

> In sum . . . generative grammarians would agree that a language is learned through an active cognitive process rather than through an externally imposed process of conditioning and drill. Further, they would agree that grammatical rules are psychologically real and that people must use these rules—consciously or not—in speaking or understanding a language.[9]

Chomsky himself has given us the following very clear warning about such claims, and I suggest we heed it:

> I am, frankly, rather skeptical about the significance, for teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics and psychology . . . [and] . . . suggestions from the 'fundamental disciplines' must be viewed with caution and skepticism."[10]

We must heed it if we are to resist the stampede in what I have called the contemporary period of language teaching towards the adoption of a new pedagogy in which the new linguistics, the new psychology, and the new demands made of our educational system will find themselves welded into a new unity which will have *as little theoretical justification as any past unity*.

Let me substantiate this last statement since it obviously requires a defense. If we look back to what I have called the prelinguistic period, we can now see that there was really little or no reason for the particular unification of linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical understandings that occurred. We can make the same statement for the linguistic period. During this period there were in existence other views of linguistics, psychology, and education than those particular ones which found their way into the linguistic method. However, the kind of unity that the method provided did give its practitioners an approach, or a theoretical basis, or a rationale, within which to work. As

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[8] William E. Bull, *Spanish for Teachers: Applied Linguistics* (New York: Ronald Press, 1965), p 18.

[9] Karl Diller, "Generative Grammar and Foreign Language Teaching."

[10] Noam Chomsky, "Linguistic Theory." Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Reports of the Working Committees, p. 43.

Edward Anthony has pointed out,[11] an approach is axiomatic so that it is by definition beyond proof or disproof. An approach is a matter of belief, and the beliefs on which the linguistic method was based came from many sources. It may even be said that on occasion an approach is based not so much on axioms or beliefs as that axioms and beliefs are developed in an apparent attempt to justify existing methods. Perhaps at some time we would do well to examine the linguistic method in detail to see if it is not just an instance of this latter process of justification. Today, though, the system of beliefs associated with the linguistic method is held by a declining number of the key people in second-language teacher training. In such training we are engaged in formalizing a new approach which will be based on beliefs that we find to be acceptable today. But while we seek to formulate a set of axioms, actual teaching innovations are occurring in the classrooms. Gradually there will be an inevitable merging of theory and practice, and *ipso facto* a new unity will emerge. This will happen, but it has not yet happened.

There is though, let me add, a kind of puzzle in all of this. We do not need to have this new unity because it is intrinsically better than either of the previous unities I have characterized. Indeed, I do not know how we could test for *better* or *worse* in this sense. We need a new unity for an entirely different reason. *We need it in order to reflect our current characterization of the basic disciplines and to justify what we are doing in classrooms.* We need it so that we can feel that our practice is theoretically justified, so that we can consider ourselves to be up to date, and so that we can be properly committed to our jobs. At the moment many of our younger teachers feel rather insecure. They find the linguistic method quite unacceptable since it employs the wrong rhetoric. They cannot believe in it; consequently, the method will not work for them. But they have nothing to replace it with, for there is no new rhetoric available as yet. For them there is no self-fulfilling prophecy, the prophecy which says that to make something work you must believe in it; believe in something and it will work for you.

Let me conclude by saying that it is just such systems of belief and commitment which are above all important in our task of training teachers in TESOL. It is up to all of us to help the next generation of TESOL teachers find an approach to their teaching which will serve them as well as the linguistic method has served us and probably still serves us. I myself do not agree entirely with Alfred Hayes when he writes:

> [Teachers] must somehow cease to regard 'methods' as matters of 'belief,' while learning to understand and to question the assumptions underlying suggested approaches.[12]

Certainly we must train teachers to question, but they need to believe in what they are doing, too. Blind un-

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[11] Edward M. Anthony, "Approach, Method, and Technique," *English Language Teaching*, 17 (January, 1963), 63–67.

[12] Alfred S. Hayes, Foreword to *Trends in Language Teaching*, ed Albert Valdman (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. vi.

questioning belief is what we must avoid, but belief in a unified approach is what teachers must have in order to succeed in their teaching. One of the greatest challenges we have before us as trainers of the next generation of teachers in TESOL and other disciplines is to help them to articulate a set of beliefs which will allow them to be as successful as we have been, and which at the same time gives them the opportunity to grow and change as the theoretical advances in linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy continue. It is an exciting challenge and one which demands our fullest attention.